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CIA chief seeks less hush-hush

But security leaks might be prosecuted

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The new director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Adm. Stansfield Turner, intends to re-examine all the agency's secret operations with a view to seeing which can be conducted in the open.

At the same time, Admiral Turner says he believes that revelations of secret payments to King Hussein of Jordan damaged the confidence of foreign countries in their ability to do business with the United States on a confidential basis.

The new CIA chief would favor consideration of imposing criminal sanctions against government officials who disclose national-security secrets to the press. He has already discussed this question with Attorney General Griffin B. Bell.

At a breakfast meeting with journalists in his first on-the-record remarks since senatorial confirmation for the top intelligence job, Admiral Turner also gave an assessment of Soviet intentions vis-à-vis the United States.

He sees the Soviets as striving for overall superiority over the United States. But in his view, the Russians are handicapped by a "dying" ideology and an economy and technology that lag behind the United States. To make up for these shortcomings, the Soviets are stressing raw military power in the hope of translating it into political advantage.

"The Soviets are well behind us economically and unlikely to close that gap," the admiral said, adding that they had a better chance of closing the technology gap.

"They think they're ahead of us ideologically but in fact their ideology is dying and not effective," he continued. "They think very much in 19th century terms and are trying in 19th century terms to use military strength to overcome their other shortcomings."

Asked if the Soviets are seeking "superiority," the new CIA director said: "They are

looking for a total superiority, not military superiority only. Their objective is to be a dominant global power... 'the' dominant global power, if you like."

Of the Soviet armed forces, he said, "We're seeing considerable improvement, qualitatively and quantitatively."

On the question of security leaks, the admiral repeated the view he has expressed at his confirmation hearings two weeks ago. He said that he would be "most amenable" to consideration of criminal sanctions against government officials who leak classified information, a view that seems to be at odds with that of President Carter and Vice-President Walter F. Mondale.

Mr. Carter said at a press conference Wednesday that he would hope penalties other than criminal penalties could be used to discourage the disclosure of national-security secrets. Mr. Mondale had said earlier that he was "personally opposed" to the imposition of any criminal penalties on government officials who allow such secrets to become public.

Admiral Turner said the U.S. Espionage Act, which is 60 years old, contains imprecise language and is "not very effective."

"What we need is that there be some effective sanctions," he said.

The matter is apparently of such importance to Admiral Turner that he had already met with Attorney General Bell to discuss it on Tuesday, within three days of moving into his new office at the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

Admiral Turner said he is not in favor of sanctions against the press for the publication of national-security information but left it to the judgment of the press itself as to whether it was right in publishing, as the Washington Post did, the information about CIA payments to King Hussein.

The rights guaranteed the press in the First Amendment to the Constitution "won't be violated," he said.

The CIA director said he had not yet had a chance to look fully into the details of the payments to King Hussein and was not yet certain whether they had ceased, as has been reported in the press.

He said that in re-examining covert operations with a view to conducting as many as possible in the open, he would apply two criteria: (1) whether it is necessary to carry out a particular operation secretly ("Can we do it some other way?") and (2) what the risk is for the country in disclosure (how realistic is it to think such an operation could be carried out effectively in the open?).

"Certainly the tenor of the country, of the Congress, today says we should put as much in the press — in the open — as possible," he said.

The United States wants to remain an open society, whose great strength is concern for the individual and his rights, he said, but to run an effective intelligence organization, "there